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On Becoming Historically Conscious Leaders: Exploring The Underlying Effects Of Transgenerational Transmission of Collective Traumas

Tcholakian, L.A.

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SUMMARY

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Over the past sixty years, contemporary academic research has been inundated with leadership studies that aim to understand the nature of leadership and to explore leadership styles, functions and competencies due to the incredibly influential role that leadership has played in organizational life. Given the importance of leadership in the scholarly world and in practical life, the study of leadership has attracted multiple scholars from a wide array of disciplines, such as economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy and history. One persistently omitted topic is the role and meaning of historical collective traumas in leader development and in shaping leader identities and leader values and the meaning that historical narratives of collectives have for organizational leaders. This knowledge gap and relevant questions raised on this matter are the key drivers of this dissertation.

Drawing on a specific historical element such as the transgenerational transmission of collective traumas, I assessed the role of historical narratives and historical consciousness in leaders, their values and their beliefs. At its early stages, my research journey began with a particular normative interest in and commitment to the study of the Armenian genocide and what this historical event means to leaders who are descendants of this trauma. Subsequently, my research

process unlocked new opportunities for my thinking and my philosophy to evolve from a normative and functionalist approach to a subjective, interpretative and social constructionist study on the role of historical narratives and historical consciousness in leader development.

The central evolved idea is that understanding who leaders are in the context of their historical narratives provides an indication of their worldview and how this worldview shapes what leaders do. More specifically, in this dissertation, I attempt to address the role that historical collective traumas and historical inheritances play for leaders, their development, their values and their identities. I initially began to assess leaders who were descendants of a specific collective trauma – the Armenian genocide, and then came to explore leaders and executives who are descendants of a variety of collective traumas.

Motivated by the goal of shedding light on the concepts of transgenerational transmission of collective trauma, historical inheritances, historical narratives and historical consciousness in leaders and leadership studies, I embarked on several empirical studies, as described in the dissertation chapters, in collaboration with other authors.

First, through a conceptual analysis, Chapter 2 identifies and clarifies key constructs such as collective trauma, the transgenerational transmission of collective trauma and leader development. We explore how collective memories and histories reside in family narratives and

stories; communities; and cultural traditions, rituals and artifacts, and are processed through our understanding of three theories: social learning, social identity and psychodynamics. We develop a conceptual model and eleven propositions for future research to address. These propositions are relevant to historical inheritances of collective traumas in relation to leader development and, more specifically, the development of leader values.

Chapter 3 assesses the drivers from Chapter 2 and explores the vital role that historical narratives play for leaders, their view of their reality, and their sense of self. Through their narratives on the Armenian genocide, research participants undertake a self-reflexive process and derive elements relevant to their identity and their inherited values. We discover that the process of historical narratives on collective traumas can trigger a process of historical consciousness in leaders, which in turn constructs motivations and expectations for critical and moral identities that become a basis for their leadership roles. We propose a model guided by Rüsen's process of historical consciousness and explore how leader participants extract moral lessons from their genocide narratives, which lead to a greater sense of self and offer guidance for ethical actions and expectations for their future.

Chapter 4 undertakes an additional direction and explores how historical inheritances offer a lens on ethnicity or ethnic inheritances,

which allow Armenian leader participants to acquire and interpret their experiences as part of their self-awareness. Research participants identify ethnic elements of their development stages in life and in this process share self-understandings and self-knowledge characteristics of authenticity. We develop a model that describes how ethnicity helps leaders in their *ways of seeing*, which help enact an *authentic* consciousness of the self. By managing their relationship with their past and their connection to their roots, leaders *become* authentic. The research explores how leaders who rediscover their ethnic inheritances become attuned to their sense of values and their sense of self.

Chapter 5 extends the knowledge acquired in Chapters 2 and 3 and examines how management and leadership executive learning programs can propose historical consciousness by introducing the topic of the transgenerational transmission of collective traumas and inciting historical consciousness in executives. By reflecting on their past through conversations and reflective assignments, executive students can better understand how their past may have shaped their present and their sense-making of their role in the future. Our developed model describes the temporality of the identified themes relevant to historical consciousness; these themes include historical narratives, narrative competence, and the three key learnings that emerged (*sensemaking*, *sense of purpose*, and *expectations for the future*). We conclude by encouraging the use

of historical collective traumas in management executive education programs as a pertinent instrument for executives to critically engage in self-reflexive processes that sensitize them to address human practices of management.

This dissertation concludes by highlighting the implications of subjective and interpretative ontologies and methodologies in the study of leader development by addressing historical narratives and collective traumas. Considering the diversification of organizational leaders and the world in general, we believe that this topic is increasingly relevant today. To our knowledge, this research is the first of its kind to consider collective traumas and relevant historical inheritances as key concepts and elements in understanding the general make-up of leaders and their roles in organizations. In terms of practical implications, we highlight the importance of incorporating history and historical narratives that can be used as valuable resources for organizations and organizational actors to acquire strategic and competitive advantages, to authentically develop organizational cultures, and to shape organizational teams. Our findings also offer management and leadership executive studies ways to identify, interpret and develop historical consciousness and allow students to identify presumed assumptions, critically interpret their actions and behaviors, and develop moral expectations in their professional lives.

Finally, the results of this dissertation establish the importance

of integrating existing research on the transmission of collective trauma in relation to leader development in order to bridge historical contexts (and historical narratives) in the study of leaders, leader values and leader behaviors. I hope that this work provides a stepping stone for future research in leader development; encourages cross-disciplinary frameworks, such as history and leadership; and encourages subjective interpretive research on leaders to better help us understand the vital roles that leaders play in organizations today.